



April 11, 2022

TO: The State of Vermont Senate Appropriations Committee
FROM: Greater Bennington Interfaith Council

Proposal to Expand Housing First Services in Bennington County

Dear Chair Kitchel and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

The Greater Bennington Interfaith Council, a group of clergy and members of faith communities in Bennington, Vermont, respectfully requests your support Pathways Vermont's proposal into Bennington County. We on the Interfaith Council have been concerned for years about the homelessness situation here in our county.

Last summer our Interfaith Council invited Pathways Vermont to make a community presentation at one of our "Walloomsac Riverwalks," a monthly walk that brings community members and organizations together to talk about the needs of our community. We were deeply impressed with Pathways' presentation and believe their "Housing First" model to be an important and successful way to address chronic homelessness.

Bennington County has one of the highest rates of chronic homelessness in the State and a disproportionate need relative to population size. There are approximately seventy households experiencing chronic homelessness in Bennington County, as documented by our local Coordinated Entry team. We were fortunate this year, thanks to CARES funding, to have Pathways Vermont support more than thirty Bennington County households, many of them families, out of homelessness. Additionally, this year Pathways expanded their Department of Corrections project into Bennington to support individuals exiting incarceration who were facing housing instability. This was such a great contribution of help with our homelessness challenge. Please extend our deep gratitude to whoever made that designation of funding possible.

We truly hope that the Pathways' request to expand their "Housing First" services into Bennington County will become a reality. Such a long-term commitment will make a substantive difference here, as it has for six other counties across the State. Long-term Pathways support will enable them to target households living with disabilities and significant mental health challenges who currently lack access to permanent housing. It will reduce the burden on our overtaxed emergency housing systems and improve the lives of some of our most vulnerable community members. It will significantly reduce the rate of chronic homelessness in our communities.

We appreciate the committee's consideration of our support and are happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Michael F. Wajda, Convenor